



**FEMA**

**STRENGTHENING DISASTER RECOVERY FOR THE NATION**



# **Strengthening Disaster Recovery for the Nation**

## **VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (VTC)**

### **Region X**

**Time:** November 2, 2009, Monday, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Pacific)

**Participating Locations:** FEMA Region X, Alaska,  
Idaho, Oregon, Washington

**Participation Via:** VTCs, Phone Bridge (only) and through WebEx

**Sectors Represented:** Federal and State agencies, nonprofits and private sector

**Note:** This product is provided as a general summary only, not a transcript of the discussion.

## Region X VTC Summary

Seattle, Washington

November 2, 2009

Region X addressed questions through Group discussion. Facilitators asked for volunteers from different backgrounds to provide the first response to start the conversation. All questions were addressed.

### PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

**NOTE:** Responses are by questions **posed** and are noted using the original sequencing.

#### Q1: How would you define a successful disaster recovery?

- Region X participants began the discussion by suggesting “recovery” be redefined as (or rethought of) “**renovation**” when considering long-term recoveries. Participants made the following observations when thinking of how recovery might be defined:
  - Restoration of **social** and **economic** equilibrium.
  - Restoration of **culture** and **health** of community.
  - Recovery defined as a “**3-legged stool**” including:
    - Physical.
    - People (Social).
    - Economic.
  - Recovery should bring community back to a **NEW normal**.
  - Definition should include **sustainability** and **resiliency**.
  - Recovery should achieve an **improved condition**.
  - Result in a stabilized community — **no longer dependent on government** to survive.
  - **Reestablishing the tax base** is a condition of recovery.
  - Putting **physical infrastructure** back into place.

#### Q2: Are there clear phases in the disaster recovery process that are useful milestones?

- Participants said it is “**still**” **unclear as to when phases start**; the phase concept needs definition; however, there is **no need for clear boundaries for phases** — recovery should begin day one.
- Other observations include:
  - There are Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs available to respond to the different phases of recovery.
  - From the local perspective there are three (3) general phases of recovery:
    - Local triage.
    - FEMA engagement.
    - Release of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.
  - **Milestones** include recovery of tax base and schools.

- “**Response**” and “**recovery**” are different and should be treated as such.
- Participants think **preparedness** is important to recovery and want to see citizens and authorities reminded to not forget preparedness — it is the preparation for recover.
- Phases include **temporary housing** to **permanent housing**.

### Q3: What features of Federal disaster recovery assistance are most important to you?

- Region X participants identified features important to them and compiled a list of things they would like to see.

#### IMPORTANT FEATURES

- Reestablishing the **tax base**. Participants noted that threats to communities also impact the tax base (e.g. eminent flooding of Kent Valley related to Howard Hanson Dam Leak).
- **Mitigation programs** that help communities improve their ability to withstand future threats.
- **Preparedness** initiatives. For example, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is anticipating flood events; preparedness efforts include working with rental housing and utilizing existing resources.

#### NEW FEATURES WANTED

- **Catalog** to identify all Federal resources, programs, funding and rules.
- A listing of Federal programs **cross-indexed** to physical, social and economic-related projects.
- More Federal involvement with **major infrastructure projects**.
- The **rapid release** of funds.
- Project identification and understanding of projects **while the Joint Field Office (JFO) is still open**.
- **Published list** of projects so Health and Human Services (HHS) or other nonprofit groups can support them.
- The American Red Cross would like to **better understand the schedule and process** for FEMA relief efforts.
- **Improved communications** between FEMA and Federal partner agencies and locals.
- **Unity of effort**. Participants feel this is best achieved **by establishing relationships with recovery partners prior to disaster** events. While relationships may be achievable during most disaster events, catastrophic situations are more challenging. Relationships developed prior to a disaster ensure a more coordinated, efficient and effective recovery effort.
- Participants also identified a forward-action planning question to consider **how better to support disasters without a Declaration**: *How can we duplicate the functions of a JFO organization without a Disaster Declaration?*

### Q4: How would you measure progress and what specific metrics should be considered for a successful disaster recovery?

- For metrics to be meaningful, participants said a **baseline** is needed so that recovery can be measured against it. Metrics they identified as useful in determining if recovery is successful include:
  - A **three (3) inter-related metrics** model that provides indicators for the progress of recovery by looking at:
    - **Businesses** (availability of goods and services, distribution, etc.).
    - **Shelter** (from temporary to permanent housing).
    - **Schools** (are kids there or have families moved or unable to locate locally).
  - Monitoring **dependence on government programs**. As recovery progresses, dependency on government programs will lessen.
  - **Resiliency** measures. Resiliency is captured by:
    - Risk analysis.
    - Commitment to reduce risk.
    - Insuring for risk.
  - Inputs.
- American Red Cross is interested in measuring **the social metrics**, such as increases in community activities to determine recovery progress and success.
- While not a specific metric, participants identified an important underlying principle of recovery: Going **beyond equilibrium** with mitigation — be prepared to reduce risk and recover more wisely.

#### Q5: What are best practices in managing recovery from disasters?

- Participants identified the following best practices in recovery management:
  - **Emergency Support Function (ESF) #14** Long-Term Community Recovery Planning.
  - **406 Mitigation** program.
  - The **JFO** is an excellent example of **coordinated response in the field**.
  - **Voluntary Organization in Active Disaster (VOAD)** provides a great example of **coordinated nonprofit** and **voluntary response**.
  - **HHS** had a good **cadre management** pilot project during Gustav that should be emulated and has a process for contacting individuals at shelters to determine **progress in recovery**.
  - The use of “Fast Teams.”
  - **One particular state’s** relationship-building efforts with recovery partners **prior to disaster events**.
- Additionally, participants want communities and recovery leadership to:
  - Make **mitigation a priority**. They suggest **fast-tracking hazard mitigation** efforts while JFO is still open.
  - Coordinate recovery plan development that includes the **vision, values, objectives** in recovery and articulates the desired **end-state** of recovery efforts prior to disasters so that time is not spent on those issues in the “heat” of an event.

#### Q6: What are the appropriate State, local and Tribal roles in leading disaster recovery efforts?

- Participant discussion focused on the role of local communities and local leadership during recovery:

#### LOCAL ROLES

- Local community needs to be active in developing a **Pre-Event Plan** so they can lead the recovery efforts.
- It is a **local responsibility to lead recovery** with State and Federal support.
- Some local agencies “permit” Federal partners to lead. Participants feel that is a trend that must be corrected.
- Federal and State agencies want to know how they can support. **Local leadership needs to articulate needs, identify gaps and prioritize needs** up front.
- Locals are challenged to be strong-willed during disasters to let FEMA and State support understand that they **should not have to discard values** to meet specific rules of programs that do not fit their communities.

#### AT ALL LEVELS

- Successful recovery depends in part on **strong leadership** and a **defined “end-state.”**
- **Tribal leadership** needs to be involved in recovery planning and decision-making.
- Value needs to be put on **outreach programs**; outreach efforts need appropriate funding to be effective and successful.
- Participants noted one certain state’s **local disaster planning** post-Katrina as an example of a great Best Management Practice (BMP).

#### Q7: How can the nonprofit and private sectors be better integrated into recovery?

- To increase and support integration of nonprofits and the private sectors participants think it important that recovery leadership:
  - Understand **goals** of nonprofits involved.
  - **Start now** not after an event to build relationships, understand priorities and think about where groups fit into recovery planning.
  - Establish **liaison officers** to work with nonprofits and private sector elements now.
  - Communicate **rules** for funding to nonprofit and other groups.
  - **Include** private and nonprofit groups in recovery process.
  - **Recognize value** of private sector participation by **staffing and funding outreach**. Participants recommend investing in a dedicated staff person to do outreach to private sector.
  - Small Business Administration (SBA) is a good example of a resource that works with businesses pre- and post-disaster event; **relationships are already cemented**.
  - Provide a continuous process for nonprofits and coalition leaders to **meet routinely**. Participants note that this approach helps with small events especially.
  - **Share disaster case management** information with recovery community.
- Use disaster drills **to build partnerships** on “sunny days” with infrastructure owners, utility operations and others critical to recovery. Participants noted one state’s approach: They use disaster drills (for potential energy loss, other unexpected events) and fund a full-time liaison with VOAD.

- Participants noted that nonprofits can have an important role in supporting locals as Emergency Operations Center (EOC) **shuts down**.
- And fully **90 percent of recovery work should be done pre-disaster**.

**Q8: What are best practices for community recovery planning that incorporates public input?**

- Participants noted several BMPs involving **nonprofits** and outreach for preparedness:
  - **Urban League** helped channel public input during Nisqually earthquake.
  - One state's **housing project** was a BMP where Federal authorities gave appropriate recovery tools to local government and **handed off CDBG funds for implementation**.
  - **HUD's** efforts in one specific county are an Emergency Preparedness BMP for eminent threat to two regions and possible flooding. Major **outreach to legislators, local governments, media, utilities, families, etc. to target preparedness** for major event to occur.
- Participants would like to see:
  - Federal Internal Affairs, FEMA mitigation community education outreach and hazard mitigation planning outreach divisions should **pool into one planning arm** with a unified voice.
  - A planning group developed for **all outreach efforts**. They noted outreach should be **coordinated** and **intentional**.

**Q9: How can Federal, State and local disaster planning and recovery processes and programs be best coordinated?**

- Meeting participants responded to this question under previous questions.

**Q10: As disaster recovery is primarily a State and local leadership issue, what are best practices for the timing (including start and end) and form of Federal assistance and coordination?**

- Region X participants want to see:
  - Recovery planning to **start now** on "a sunny day" and continue as an ongoing process.
  - "Ready" the system so disaster projects can **seamless transition to existing programs** (while priority needs to be given to areas with direct damage, attention should be given to secondary consequences "outside" the disaster area).
  - Relationships **built now, pre-disaster**.

**Q11: What are the greatest capacity challenges that local and State governments face in disaster recovery and what are the best practices for increasing that capacity?**

- Participants want to see **capacity building within HHS**.
- They noted that HHS funds personal disasters daily and is underfunded now, so it is very **difficult to fund preparedness for vulnerable populations when there is no money for daily caseloads**.
- Faith-based organizations should be **included early** in recovery. They have lots of capacity that is not fully utilized.
- **Redundancies** need to be removed from the intake process. Every organization and agency has one and the intake process frustrates users. Multiple intakes increase the frustration.
- FEMA **should allow access** to intake information. **Privacy act issues** need to be resolved so information can be shared.
- Participants want to see **“tier” levels removed** from HUD projects to make intake process more user-friendly.
- And they want **funding constraints removed** during disaster events to allow HUD funding to be used.
- Federal agencies need **economic development capacity** to further help communities. Long-term recoveries depend in part, upon restoration of the economic base.
- Participants said a best practices is to create and encourage **linkages between volunteer or nonprofit groups** who are underutilized and those agencies over capacity.

**Q 12: What are best practices for marshaling Federal assistance — both financial and professional support —to support State and local efforts to recover from a disaster, and how can we work together to better leverage existing Federal grant dollars?**

- Region X suggested the creation of **Federal Executive Boards**.
- They commented:
  - Local Housing Taskforce with a particular county — is a resource for **understanding programs**. No need for clear boundaries for phases-recovery should begin day one.
  - *This National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) Initiative* — great best practice for **showcasing Federal coordination capabilities**.

**Q13: What unmet needs are common to most disasters that do not seem to be adequately addressed under the current systems and programs?**

- HHS has unmet **mental health** assistance and resources for children and vulnerable and at risk populations during disasters.
- Unmet focus on areas **outside the rubble**.
- Unmet focus on **seasonal/home-based businesses**.
- **Disaster case management** needs funding improvements to help with information flow.
- Unmet needs relative to **understanding government programs**.
- Need resources to **track and support individuals not registered** but supporting a household.
- Need to track **migratory workers** and **transient populations** after a disaster.
- Need help keeping track of **population grounded in the locale** versus migrating out.

- Need **outreach improvements**, especially for non-English speakers.



**Q 14: What are best practices for integrating economic and environmental sustainability into recovery?**

- Participants want coordinated leadership to develop a plan that includes the **values, objectives in recovery**, and **desired end-state of recovery efforts** prior to disasters so that time is not spent on those issues.

**Q15: What are best practices for integrating mitigation and resilience into recovery?**

- Region X participants feel Federal agencies have good programs but **preparedness** must occur first.

**Q16: What else would you like us to know?**

- No direct responses —participants were referred to the Web site